

Different Gifts, Same Spirit

Creating a Learning Community Where Everyone Belongs

JUNIOR HIGH STUDENT



THE GIFTS WE HAVE

Sean has been good friends with Matthew for almost nine years. In kindergarten, when Matthew first came to this school, Sean became his “buddy.” Matthew happens to have cerebral palsy. He may fall when he walks. Sean says sometimes it’s hard for Matthew to keep up with the other children. But, if you put a basketball in Matthew’s hands and watch him shoot from the free throw line, he’ll put the school’s star player to shame. Matthew has different gifts. Sean has come to understand this through his friendship over the years. Sean doesn’t see Matthew as a person with disabilities, rather he knows that Matthew has many gifts to share.

Remember, we all have things that we can do and things that we cannot do.

List five gifts or talents that you feel you have.

List five things that are difficult for you to do.



The dictionary defines disability as “lack of competent power, strength or physical or mental ability.” Some people, like Matthew, have a physical disability. They might use a wheelchair, crutches or other aids to move about. Some people have difficulty with vision or hearing. Most physical disabilities are visible, ones that we can see. Other disabilities are invisible, like cancer, diabetes, arthritis, depression and others.

A YOUNG GIRL’S GIFTS

Paige brought many gifts to her parish community during her battle with leukemia, a kind of cancer. She shared gifts of love, hope, joy and courage.

A few days before starting first grade, Paige was diagnosed with cancer. Sometimes people don’t think of cancer as a disability, but it can be very disabling. Often Paige used a wheelchair when she was too weak to walk. It was difficult for her to remember things she learned. During her whole first grade year, she was only able to make it to school for a total of seven days.

While Paige was away, all the children in her school were taught about different types of cancer, the treatments Paige was going through and the effects from these treatments. They learned that Paige would be wearing a mask when she returned to school. This was not because the other students would catch her disease, but rather to prevent Paige from getting any germs. When Paige finally was able to join her classmates



*Joseph Cardinal Bernardin
Archbishop of Chicago
1982-1996*

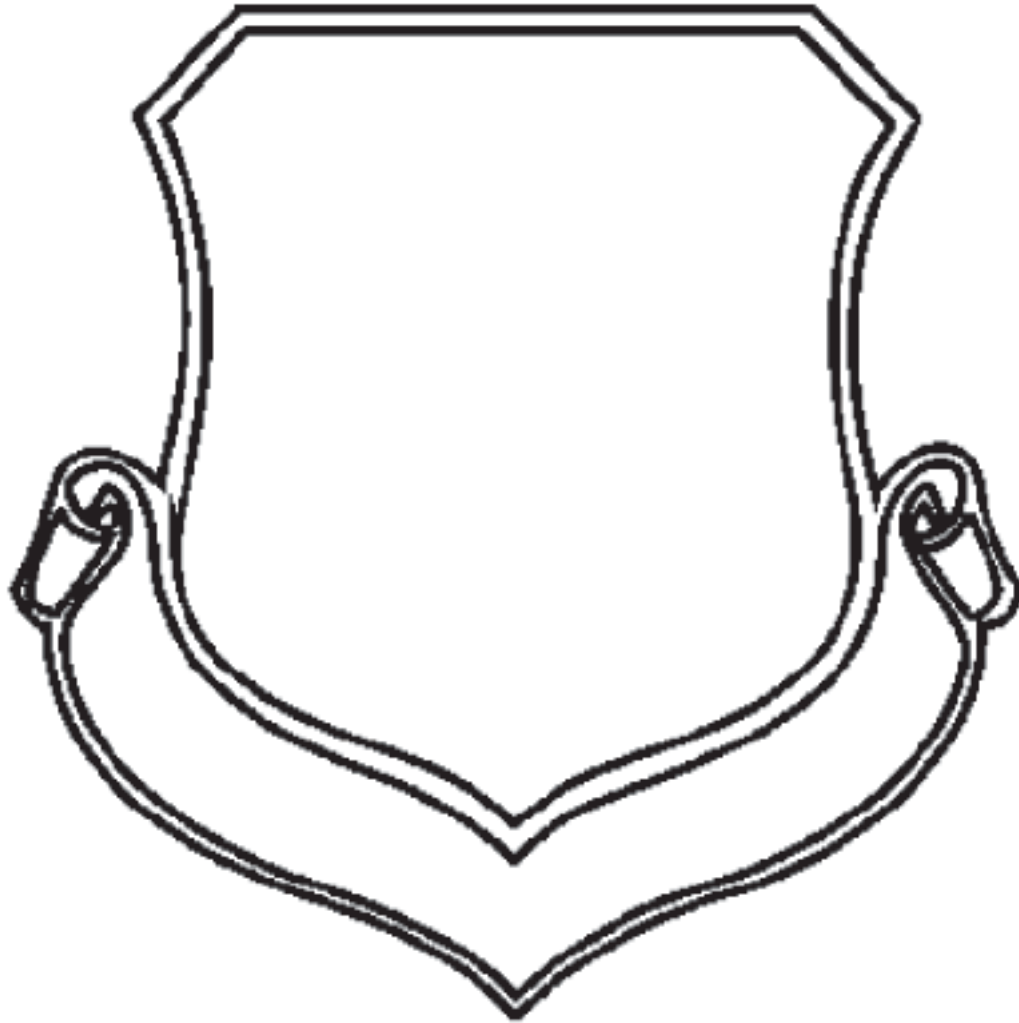
for the last few days of first grade, they all wore masks with her so she wouldn’t feel out of place.

The following year, Cardinal Bernardin went on television to tell the people of Chicago about his cancer. Paige immediately wrote him a letter because she didn’t want him to be sad. She sent him pictures of herself when she was bald from her chemotherapy treatments, and after the treatments as her hair began to grow back. Paige wanted the Cardinal to know that his hair would grow back, too. He sent her a letter back thanking her for her concern and delighting in the fact that someone had hope for his hair growing back.

Paige’s battle with cancer ended when she was 9 years old. Elizabeth, a high school student and a friend, wrote this about her, “Even though she was only 9, Paige’s strong spirit gave me inspiration. She still gives me hope in knowing that I can face anything because Paige did.”

ACTIVITY – MEDIEVAL SHIELD

In medieval times, knights used shields as protection when they went into battle and also so others would know who they were. These shields had family crests and other important symbols on them. Write your family name on your shield. Add three symbols to your shield: one symbol for what gives you hope, another symbol for something that you've done that took courage, and finally, a symbol for something that you've seen someone else do that took courage.



One in five Americans has a disability. Read Know Your Disability Etiquette on pages five to seven so that you know how to comfortably interact with classmates and parishioners of all abilities.

Your school and parish are invited to celebrate an annual That Every Ability May Belong Month to reflect on how well our worship and learning communities create a sense of belonging for parishioners and students with disabilities and their families. You can volunteere to help! Use the TEAM Belong Month Workbook at www.TEAMBelong.org for ideas, educational activities and liturgies.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

In the New Testament, St. Paul challenged the Corinthians to look at the different gifts that each person was bringing to the Body of Christ.

Read Chapter 12, verses 4 through 11.

All the gifts we have are for the good of all in the community. Jesus takes us as we are. He recognizes all of us as his brothers and sisters. We bring our different gifts to our parish community. We gather each Sunday as this Body of Christ as we celebrate Eucharist.

For example, Chuck is the head usher at his church. He is 54 years old. He had a stroke this past year, which left his right side partially paralyzed. After extended therapy, he can walk with a leg brace and a cane. Some days he still uses his wheelchair. When he was able to come back to church, he resumed his position as usher. He is still the captain of the team, greeting the people at the doors before Mass and distributing bulletins.

- Does your parish invite people with disabilities to be ministers at the Eucharist or to hold other leadership positions? Why or why not?

CHALLENGE

Take a walk around your parish and school grounds and note how accessible the buildings are.

- What do you find that is accessible?
- What do you find that needs to be changed for those who have disabilities?
- How can you as an individual or as a class work to make your school, RE program and parish more open for those people who have disabilities?

PRAYER

Join together in a prayer!

*Dear Lord,
We thank you for the many different gifts you have given to all of us.
We thank you for inviting all to your table.
Help us to have open hearts to reach all those who want to join us.
Help us to have open minds to begin to know better the gifts that each person brings to our family.
Help us to open the doors of your church for all people.
We know your love is for each and every one of us!
AMEN*

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KNOW YOUR DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

Use the tips below so that you know how to comfortably interact with classmates and parishioners of all abilities.

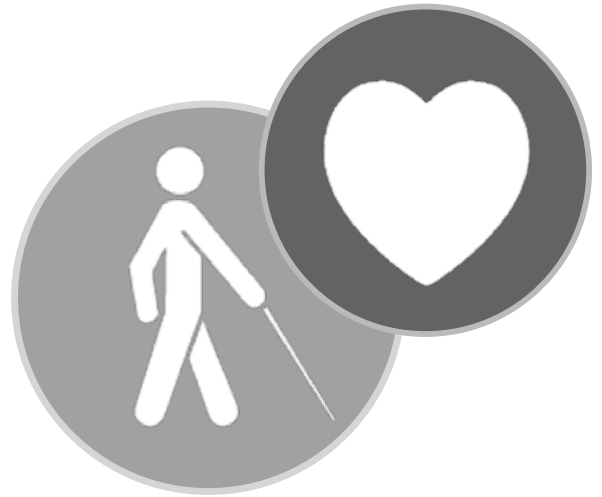
GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What do you say when you meet a person with a disability? How about, “Hello?”
2. A warm smile and friendly conversation are very welcoming.
3. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not only to the family member, companion, interpreter or canine companion.
4. Use people-first language such as “people with disabilities” NOT “the disabled” and “a parishioner who is blind” NOT “a blind parishioner.”
5. Ask the person with the disability HOW you can help. Respect any refusal.
6. Offer accessible seating, large-print bulletins, missalettes, or assistive listening devices. Know where accessible washrooms are.
7. Recognize that each person has gifts and abilities. Ask parishioners with disabilities if they would like to usher, bring up the gifts, proclaim the word, etc. and provide any accommodations needed.
8. Be sensitive to where a person wishes to receive communion – at their seat or at the altar – and make sure they are accommodated.
9. Feel comfortable using words like see, walk, and listen with persons with disabilities.
10. Use accessibility logos in print materials and on signage.



WELCOMING PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE VISION LOSS

1. Identify yourself when you greet the person. Tell the person when you are about to leave.
2. Talk normally, using your customary voice and typical expressions like “See you later.”
3. Offer your arm when assisting, the same way an usher does at a wedding.
4. Give verbal cues such as “We are going through a doorway.” Explain the traffic pattern with clear, calm instructions such as “Go up the center aisle.”



WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY DIFFERENCES

1. Speak directly to the person.
2. Offer assistance, but accept a “No, thank you.”
3. Sit down so that you are at eye-level if the conversation will last more than a few minutes.
4. Shake hands or lightly touch a shoulder in the same way you would with others.
5. Keep a person’s wheelchair or walker near the person.

WELCOMING PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

1. Face the person. He/she will appreciate seeing your facial expression and may read your lips. Your face, gestures, and body movements help in understanding.
2. Move closer rather than shout.
3. Speak clearly and slowly. Writing may be necessary. →

WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DIFFERENCES

1. Be patient. Let a person talk at his/her own pace.
2. Remember a person may have communication means other than speech, such as writing.
3. Ask questions that require short answers or a shake of the head. If you cannot understand, rephrase the question.
4. Repeat or paraphrase what was said in order to confirm that you understand.



WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES

1. Greet the person and interact normally.
2. Keep things simple and uncomplicated.
3. Treat people equally regardless of participation level; give prayer books or hymnals to all; allow everyone a chance to speak.